

THE  
Prayer  
OF THE  
Lord

R . C . S P R O U L

## ENDORSEMENTS

R.C. Sproul has an amazing gift for explaining difficult truths in pithy, memorable, and easy-to-grasp ways. He is the ideal teacher for a study of the Lord's Prayer, because the prayer itself is a profound lesson on a difficult subject, given by Jesus to His disciples in an amazing economy of words. You will be greatly blessed and edified by this book.

—Dr. John MacArthur  
Pastor-teacher  
Grace Community Church  
Sun Valley, Calif.

Here is a very special book on prayer. It will not leave you overwhelmed with failure and crushed into “giving prayer yet another try”—as many books and sermons on prayer do. Instead, it will lead you gently by the hand—as Jesus did when He taught the disciples the prayer on which these pages are based. It will draw you into a sense of the privilege of prayer, stimulate new desires to pray, even leave you with a sense of the delights of prayer. These pages have an atmosphere of light and are permeated by a sense of freshness and joy. Happy indeed is the theologian who can stimulate prayer. And happy are we that R.C. Sproul is such a theologian. *The Prayer of the Lord* is—quite simply—a spiritual treat.

—Dr. Sinclair B. Ferguson  
Teaching Fellow  
Ligonier Ministries

I love listening to R.C. Sproul teach, and this book sounds just like him—penetrating truths strikingly illustrated. His good quotations and pastoral wisdom make him as easy to read as he is delightful to listen to (and the short chapters help!). Sproul clearly explains the Scriptures with sentences that are simple and accurate. He knows enough to say important things concisely and clearly—truths about the kingdom, the fatherhood of God, history, and, of course, prayer. There’s even a helpful question-and-answer section at the end. This little book now takes its place with the classics on prayer.

—Dr. Mark Dever  
Senior pastor  
Capitol Hill Baptist Church  
Washington, D.C.

Gospel-driven disciple-making in the church has historically made full use of the Apostles’ Creed, the law of God, and the Lord’s Prayer. Now through this marvelous and insightful exposition of the Lord’s Prayer, R.C. has provided disciple-making Christians and churches with an excellent and useful instrument to direct and fulfill the heart’s desire of every believer who would cry out, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

—Dr. Harry L. Reeder III  
Senior pastor  
Briarwood Presbyterian Church  
Birmingham, Ala.

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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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To the people of Saint Andrew's Chapel  
in Sanford, Florida





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ONE

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# How Not to Pray

A few years ago, when I happened to be in San Diego for a conference, I unexpectedly ran into an old friend of mine, George Miladin. George is a pianist and a master teacher—he used to host a televised teaching program for the piano called the “See and Hear Piano Series.” Seeing George again presented me with a golden opportunity, so after one of the plenary sessions of the conference, I grabbed George and said, “Let’s go find a piano.” So we looked through the church until we found a choir rehearsal room, and we went in there and closed the door. I said to George, “Teach me some things about the piano,” because I love to play the piano and learn new little things. So George, the master teacher, sat down at the piano and showed me a couple of little techniques that he uses in his repertoire.

I thought about that afterward, about how eager I was to get George aside so that he could teach me to do something I didn’t

know how to do. I will go out of my way to ask a person to teach me something if I have great admiration for his ability or prowess in a particular skill or art, particularly if it's something I'm interested in.

There was a point during the earthly ministry of Jesus when His disciples had the opportunity to do the same thing I did with my friend George. They had the opportunity to ask the Master Teacher to teach them something. Of course, Jesus had been teaching them on a daily basis for some time already. Each of them had enrolled in His school, becoming a *mathetes*, a "learner" or "student." They enrolled when Jesus said to them, "Follow Me." When He said that, He meant it literally. His school wasn't housed in a building and it didn't feature a regular schedule of classes. Jesus was a rabbi who had a peripatetic ministry; that is, He moved about from village to village, and His disciples went with Him, forming an entourage of sorts. When Jesus called the disciples, He wasn't just saying, "Follow my teachings." He literally wanted them to follow Him. So these men gathered about Jesus and walked behind Him, trying to memorize the teaching He gave them as they walked along the roads. Obviously they got more than they bargained for. Not only did they learn the great truths of the Scriptures by following after Jesus, they also were given the unspeakable privilege of being eyewitnesses of the multitude of miracles that Jesus performed.

Imagine what it must have been like to have the privilege of following Jesus around day after day, listening to His teaching and watching Him perform His miracles. I can think of lots of things they could have asked Him to teach them. The disciples

might have gone to Him and said, “Jesus, teach us how to turn the water into wine.” They might have asked, “Teach us how to walk on the water.” Or they could have said, “Teach us how to raise people from the dead.” Those are the kinds of questions I would have asked Him. But the New Testament tells us of a different request that the disciples brought to Jesus. They came to Him on one occasion, as Luke records it for us in his Gospel, and said, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1b). I find it fascinating that this was the burning question they brought to Jesus. They wanted to gain a special insight into prayer as a skill or an art.

### **The Master’s Prayer Life**

Why did they ask Him this question? My guess is that they saw the link between Jesus’ extraordinary prayer life and His power, His teaching, His character, His whole person. They must have noticed that after ministering to large crowds of people, Jesus often would withdraw by Himself. He must have felt drained from that ministry. During such times, Jesus would not simply withdraw for a half hour or so. Rather, He would go apart for long periods, and when He did so, He usually spent much of the time in intense seasons of prayer. We know of the intensity of His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He prayed with such stress and fervency that His sweat was like great drops of blood. We know that before He selected His disciples and called them to follow after Him, He spent the entire night alone in prayer. The disciples could not help but notice this commitment to prayer. They saw the intimacy Jesus had with the Father and made the connection between His prayer and His power.

So they came to Jesus asking, “Lord, teach us to pray.” And they added a little statement to that: “. . . as John also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1c). They not only had noticed Jesus’ extraordinary character, they also had seen it in John the Baptist and in John’s followers, many of whom had transferred their devotion to Christ after John had pointed to Him.

I’m not only surprised that the disciples brought this particular request to Jesus, I’m a little bit surprised by how He responded. Far be it from me to suggest that He could have given a better answer. I simply would have thought Jesus would have said to His disciples, “If you really want to learn how to pray, immerse yourselves in the Psalms,” because in the book of Psalms we have a collection of prayers that were given under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit. As the New Testament tells us, the Holy Spirit is active in assisting us in our praying. We’re not all that adept at prayer; it is a practice very few of us have mastered. We find it difficult to articulate our deepest feelings and our deepest concerns to God. Yet God is pleased to give His Holy Spirit to assist us in expressing ourselves to the Father in prayer. And He did that, obviously, for the psalmists of the Old Testament.

I’ve also been interested in some of the evaluations of church historians, which have showed that during those periods when the church flourished, when great spiritual vitality became manifest, and when worship reached its apogee—in short, during periods of special renewal—the Psalms were at the heart and center of the liturgy of the church and the devotional life of the people. Clearly, those who learn to meditate deeply on the Psalms experience the supreme Old Testament model of prayer

that is provoked by God the Holy Spirit. So I would suggest that if you really want to learn how to pray and to discover the kinds of prayers that are pleasing to God, you should immerse yourselves in the Psalms.

### Avoiding Hypocritical Practices

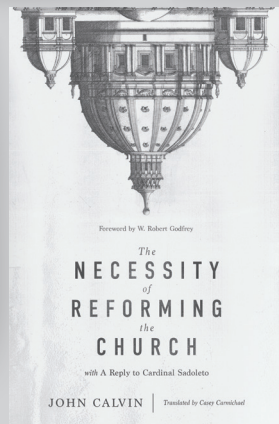
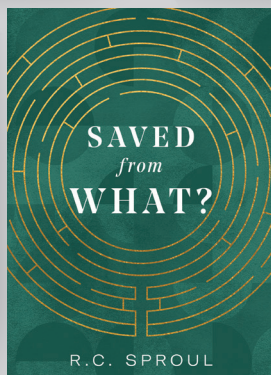
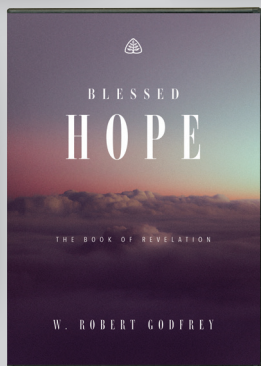
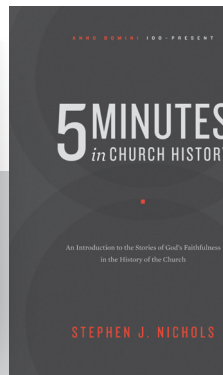
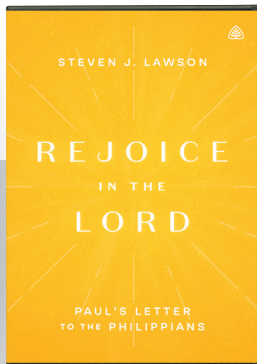
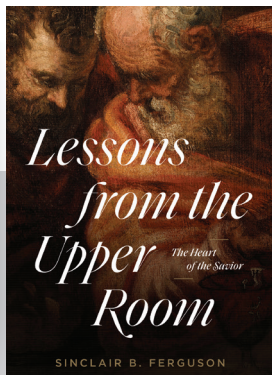
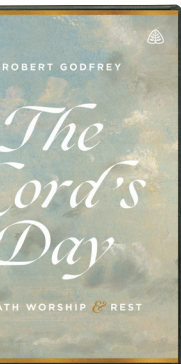
That wasn't how Jesus answered the disciples' question. Instead, He gave them what we now refer to as the Lord's Prayer, not because it was a prayer He Himself prayed, but because it was the prayer He provided for His followers. But before He gave the prayer, He made some prefatory remarks that we must not miss. In Matthew's account of the giving of the Lord's Prayer, which is recorded as part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus first said to His disciples:

“When you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret, will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.” (Matt. 6:5–7)

The disciples were looking for instructions on how to pray, but the first thing Jesus chose to tell them was how *not* to pray.



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